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aug. 24, 1961

Dear General de Gaulle:

Thank you for your message of August 18th. I am sorry that the varying approaches of Mr. Macmillan, yourself and myself made it impracticable to formulate a tripartite declaration with the speed which seemed important if it was to serve its purpose of reassuring the people of West Berlin. I trust that the concrete measures we have taken during the past week have served to do so.

Now I hope it will be possible to reach prompt agreement upon replies to the Soviet Note of August 3rd; you will have received the draft we are proposing from your Embassy here. The most important thing in this draft is its proposal for discussion of negotiations by the Foreign Ministers in New York later in September.

I fully understand, and share, your conviction that we must avoid giving any impression of material or spiritual weakness in indicating willingness to negotiate. As you know, I am convinced that the only possibility of fruitful negotiations lies in the strength which we are building and in the common determination which we are seeking to develop.

Yet I believe you share my view that a successful outcome is dependent upon a two-fold approach; the quiet but evident development of strength and the maintenance of a posture of willingness to negotiate upon a reasonable basis. The two must go forward together. The progressive strengthening of our military posture carries a message which the Soviets understand. But for most of our allies, for all of the uncommitted world, and for vital sectors of American opinion as well, the necessary complement to the military build-up is a clear willingness to negotiate. It is for this reason that I am now certain of the importance of a

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prompt public statement in this sense. On the whole, I think the arrangement proposed in the last paragraph of our draft reply is the best available to us. It is important now to announce our readiness to arrange negotiations, but it is also important not to begin the negotiations themselves until we are more fully prepared and the time is more suitable.

I know you have had serious reservations on this subject, and I have waited for some time in the hope that our associates might somehow come to agreement on the matter. But now I must appeal to you directly. A prompt proposal for negotiations is evidently necessary for most of your partners, and it is clearly best if we can go ahead in unison. I believe it of the utmost importance for our three governments to proceed together rather than indicate to the world by separate action that there is disunity even on the relatively minor issue of timing here involved. Moreover, the voice of France will be greatly needed in these discussions, precisely because of your clear understanding of the basic issues. So I hope we may be able to join together in the carefully considered procedure that is now proposed.

While I would prefer to send the reply substantially as drafted, the German Government has suggested inclusion, perhaps in connection with the discussion of self-determination, of a sentence along the following lines:

"If, however, the Soviet Union wishes to pay more than lip service to the principle of self-determination, the United States is prepared to join in conducting a plebiscite, under suitable safeguards, in which all Germans would be asked to express their position on whether they desire that a peace settlement should be entered into with a disunited or a unified Germany."

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While a proposal of a plebiscite has merit and may well be useful in the course of our continuing exchange with Moscow, my own thought is that it would be preferable to reserve it for a later point. However, if in your view the inclusion of such a proposal in our current note would serve to avoid the impression of over-eagerness to negotiate which we all wish to avoid, I should be glad to have it included.

I would hope that our replies to Moscow could be delivered and published well in advance of the opening of the meeting of uncommitted nations at Belgrade on September 1st. If this is to be done, and the other members of NATO are given even a brief opportunity to express their views upon it, it will be necessary to introduce an agreed draft in the NATO Council before the end of this week.

In the high hope that we can move together, and with renewed assurances of the highest personal regard,

Sincerely,

His Excellency  
General Charles de Gaulle  
President of the French Republic  
Paris, France

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